

P 240

Am 32

no 71

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WHY I WOULD NOT SWEAR.*

"MAY GOD——!"

"James, I am astonished—yes, shocked—to hear you thus profane the name of God. I would not thus speak for all the gold in California."

"Yes, you would, if you had been provoked as I have."

"No, sir; I trust, by the grace of God, no amount of provocation would lead me to be guilty of such profanity."

"Well, John, I would like to hear your reasons for your abhorrence of swearing. Why, it is quite common; some of the best fellows that I know swear almost every sentence."

"Yes, I know it is common, and I am sorry for it; but, on that account, it is none the less to be abhorred. On the contrary, its prevalence should make us all the more earnest in showing its true character; and I doubt not, if you listen to me candidly, you will agree with me that it is a vice which every one, having any regard for his character or for the safety of his soul should carefully shun."

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1. I would not swear, because it is foolish.

It is the mark of a clear intellect that its possessor never uses useless words in expressing his ideas. The more obtuse the intellect, the more likelihood of using useless words in expressing thoughts, and where there is scarcely any intellect, there is nothing used but words without meaning, they are all useless. If so, how foolish must the man be, who introduces useless words in his conversation—no wise man—no man who has any respect for his reputation, will do it. But the profane swearer does more, he not only introduces useless words into his conversation, but profane words. Any useless words are foolish; his are both foolish and wicked. The following incident is an illustration of their folly.

Some years ago, a gentleman, traveling on a steamboat, was deeply grieved by a company of young men, who, to pass away the time, were telling stories, interlarded with oaths. He asked and obtained their permission to tell them a story. He began: "Some years ago I was traveling on a steamboat (pots, kettles, and pans), and on arriving at a certain port (pots, kettles, and pans), I went ashore (pots, kettles, and pans), and met a friend (pots, kettles, and pans)"—He was interrupted by one of the number asking the question what "pots, kettles, and pans" had to do with the matter? He replied: "*That is my way of swearing.*" The folly of interlarding conversation with oaths was at once apparent; they saw that it weakened instead of gave force to their statements. Indeed, so much is this

the case, that even where the morality of the case is ignored, men of any strength of intellect entirely eschew its use. No lawyer of any respectability will resort to it in pleading before a jury. No physician will use it in prescribing for his patient, nor any public lecturer from the rostrum; and even politicians refrain from its use when they speak from the platform, though they may use it in the bar-room. Thus, on every hand, it is admitted, that

“To swear is neither brave, polite, *nor wise*.”

2. I would not swear, because it is an offense against good manners.

Were you to meet a friend on the street, and if you had in your possession an obscene picture, would you take it out, thrust it before his face, and say, *Look at that?* No; unless you had reached a great degree of depravity, you would be ashamed to have it known that such a picture was in your possession, much less would you thrust it before the eyes of your friend. But this is just what the swearer does when he belches out the depravity of his heart before his friends. He virtually says to them: “Look at this hideous picture, which I always carry with me. I know you like to gloat over filth; look at it in me!” What a compliment to a friend! Will good manners permit it? Not for a moment. Hence the fact that those in the habit of swearing generally restrain themselves in the presence of ladies.

Washington seems to have entertained the same opinion ; hence his famous order of August 3, 1776, in which he calls it “a vice so *mean and low*, without any temptation, that every man of sense and character despises it.”

3. I would not swear, because it is an indication of cowardice.

There are few swearers really brave men. They may rush headlong into danger with company ; but when alone—when they have time to reflect, they would tremble and shrink back where the God-fearing man, if duty called, would step boldly forward. They can swear in a crowd, but they would not dare to do it, if left alone with a dying friend, or in a graveyard in a dark night. The bravery of the habitual swearer on the battle-field has for years been suspected, and even godless generals will admit that, in an emergency requiring cool courage, a regiment of Havelocks is worth a dozen of profane swearers and drunkards.

4. I would not swear, because there is no profit in it. It has been well said,

“Lust and wine, plead pleasure, avarice, gain,
But the cheap swearer, through his open sluice,
Lets his soul run for naught.”

The remark of a quaint writer is most true : “Most sinners serve the Devil for pay ; the swearer serves the Devil gratis.” And what is strange about the matter is, that the swearer himself regards his work as of such a

worthless character, that he would not accept pay for it if offered. A few years ago, the writer of this heard of a well authenticated case of this kind. An old Quaker, passing down one of our wharves, was shocked at the profane swearing of a sailor; he went up to him and offered him a dollar to swear a few more oaths. He addressed him thus: "Friend, thee had better spit out the vile stuff that is within thee; take this dollar, and swear a few more of these oaths." The swearer was shocked at the thought of swearing for pay, and quickly turned away, ashamed of his conduct. Yet, in all seriousness, is it any worse doing it for pay, than from the impulse of a depraved heart, without regard to profit? If it is a good work, why should you be ashamed to receive pay for it? Ah, every swearer knows it is an evil work, and hence he repudiates the idea of doing it for pay. Without pay, did we say? Would that this were so. Every impenitent swearer will receive his pay, for the pen of inspiration has written, "The wages of sin, is death." But this very repudiation of pay from their fellow-men, makes it plain that swearing is a sin against knowledge. And, reader, if you have been, in days past, guilty of using profane language, we confidently appeal to you to say, do you believe it right? We know your answer: "I know it is wrong, and I am sorry I have cultivated such a habit." We have never heard a man so depraved as to advocate swearing, as right and proper.

5. I would not swear, because it tends to increase the depravity of my heart.

The swearer must have a very depraved heart, otherwise he would shudder at the thought of praying to God to curse either himself or his fellow-men, and every oath he swears tends to increase this depravity. Just as reading the Bible and calling upon God's name in prayer, etc., tend to elevate our affections, deepen our piety, and draw us nearer to God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, so swearing has the opposite effect; it assimilates us to the devil. Says an Apostle: "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse." This is specially true of the profane swearer. It would be as easy to fill our hands with pitch and not be defiled, as to fill our minds with profane thoughts until they manifest themselves in words, and not blacken our souls thereby.

6. I would not swear, because it is presumptuously impious.

Not only is it trampling under foot the command, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain;" and saying to God, by our actions, "I am not afraid of your threatenings;" it is also asking him to join us in our wickedness—virtually saying, "Unite with me, O God, in cursing this my enemy." And, reader, would you ask a godly man to engage you in such a work? Would you dare to ask a pious father to thus be a partaker and helper in your wickedness? Yet you, when you swear, address God, and ask him to aid you in your unholy work of cursing your own or your neighbor's soul! Do you not see the dreadful, the presumptuous impiety of such conduct? Was it any

wonder the prophet said (Lev. xxiii, 10.), "Because of swearing, the land mourneth." In what other way could we insult a godly man so much as to ask him to unite with us in some unholy work; much more must it be an insult to the infinitely holy God; and impious, presumptuously impious must the man be who thus insults him. Says a late writer, "When we hear God thus insulted, we wonder that his lightning sleeps, that his red right hand, which flung the revolting angels down to hell, crushes not, in sudden destruction, the puny rebel—that the shuddering earth does not swallow him up, as it did the company of Korah—that the caverns of the lost open not to receive so congenial a spirit among the blaspheming fiends."

7. I would not swear, because it exposes me to the wrath of God.

God has said, "He will not hold him *guiltless* that taketh his name in vain;" *i. e.*, he will regard such a one as worthy of punishment; and assuredly all such will be fearfully punished, unless they repent of their sins, and find pardon through the Lord Jesus Christ. So much does he reprobate this sin, that, though he only gives four commandments to set forth our duty to himself, one of them is taken up in denouncing this wickedness. Under the Old Testament dispensation, God gave this law to Moses: "He that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him;" and God is the unchanging one, and, therefore, has the same opposition to this sin still, and he has oftentimes mani-

fested it. There are more cases on record of God's punishing the sin of swearing by sudden and fearful judgments than any other sin. Oftentimes swearers have been struck dumb or dead while uttering profane oaths.

As the Psalmist expresses it, "they clothed themselves with cursing as with a garment, and it came into their bowels like water, and like oil unto their bones." (Psalm 109, 18.) If it exposed merely to the wrath of a man, since it is without profit, and ruinous to my character, impolite to my fellow-man, and foolish, most assuredly I would not swear. How much more, when it exposes me to the wrath of Him who daily sustains me in life and health, and to whom I am indebted for all my temporal blessings, and who is said in the Scriptures to be a "consuming fire."

And now, my readers, in view of these facts and arguments, let me entreat you to specially guard against this fearful sin. Let your prayer be, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." If you have, in days past, been guilty of this wickedness, delay not to confess your sin, and ask pardon for the sake of the atoning blood of Christ, and pray for grace, that in days to come you may "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time." And may God hear your prayer, forgive your sin, and by his grace enable you, instead of blaspheming his name, to praise him for his redeeming love.

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